

DADA AND VESHCH'

Dada emerges as an international movement in Zurich in 1916, in reaction to the World War and as a reactive concerted action of radical leftist and anarchist intellectuals of different nationalities and styles who were in Zurich at that time.

Dada is a reaction against bourgeois culture. Dada modernizes the world in an insolent antibourgeois style. The motives of artistic action are far wider than the territory of art. Dada presents itself as a daring intervention which will cure humanity of bourgeois dementia, such as politics, art, morality. Dada will chase away the monsters which have crawled out on the earth's surface, such as imperialism, Victorian morals and prejudices, together with the chef d'oeuvres of classical art. Dada acts; it doesn't produce works of art. Dada shakes up the stiff corpse of European culture. It tramples on sanctimonious bourgeois morality. It seethes in the cells of the healthy bourgeois brain. Dada blocks the logical train of thought and thus frees the human being from its importunate training in common sense.

Dada stripped tabooed organs, objects and actions naked, introducing a new material in art which was base and depressing by bourgeois moral standards. Through its blatant musculature of expression, Dada carried to the extreme limit the unrestrained collective will to mock the bourgeois individual cocooned in his morality.

Tristan Tzara arrived in Paris from Zurich. Tzara is seen as a leading Dadaist which he was—but he was an exponent of a certain French version of Dadaism. Parisian Dadaists, including Tzara's main rival, André Breton, concentrated on the techniques of insolent preposterous humor and nonsense under the direct influence of Breton's friend Jacques Vachais. The Paris-based magazine *Litterature* attracted a group subscribing to shock humor and bizarre actions. Influenced by psychoanalysis and Bergson, this group evolved the technique of *automatic writing* and free association. Dadaists turned themselves into devices and automata registering their own impulses, into wires transmitting the will to life through their resistance. That is precisely why Dadaists did not create works of art by laws inherent to art itself but, so to speak, brazenly accumulated interesting documentation on their brutal genius. Dada is a campaign which leaves an archive rather than museum exhibits and works of art.

Unlike all other Dadaist groups and centers, the Berlin wing was very active politically and charged with ultra-Bolshevism. Events in Russia ultimately politicized the programs of Berlin Dadaists. During

the revolution in Germany, Huelsenbeck was proclaimed Commissar of the Arts. Hausmann adopted the pseudonym of "Dadasov." Later a large part of the Berlin wing got direct political assignments from the communist movement.

The demand for political efficiency in artistic action leads Dadaist techniques to decisive public operations and offensives which undermine the bourgeois political system, the bourgeois moral imperative and the phantoms of bourgeois art. All of this helps adapt the project to the radical modernization of society. The will that modernizes society is syncretic in its nature. In it, the aesthetic and the political are inseparable. The chief materialization of this will are photo montage, propaganda posters, allegorical constructions and assemblages of machinery which disturb the bourgeois order of things. Industry, art and politics are three heads of a single body, in the throes of one and the same will to modernization.

An exhibition of Soviet avant-garde art was held in Berlin in 1922. Arriving with the exhibition, constructivist Lisitskii started publishing, along with Yerenburg, the magazine *Veshch'* (Object) which introduced the West to modern art in Soviet Russia. The spirit of constructivism, new objectivity and new materiality promoted by *Veshch'* was already popular among Berlin Dadaists. Russian constructivist Tatlin was a dominant influence on the first Dada fair in Berlin in 1920.

Political Dadaism is infected by the ideas of machinism and the organizational theories of the Russian constructivists, obviously mixed with the organizational theories of the Proletcult and its ideologist Bogdanov. Constructivist art neither embellishes life, nor creates works beyond it. It organizes life completely. In its aesthetics, the geometrical and the political mind coincide. Constructivism is a syncretic state of science and politics. The modernization of society is guaranteed by such mergers of science, art and politics.

If constructivism is called the socialism of vision, then Dadaism could be called the Bolshevism of action. In Germany Dada is taken over by Bolshevik visions of a "laboroid" space assembled of flesh and metal, of bodies and aggregates, of scaffolds and machines, of clenched fists and chanting mouths. In Berlin, Dada organizes political attractions, mounts centaurs of bodies and machines, in order to make a show of the magic of the endless proletarian feats of labor.

Constructivism and Dadaism, those kindred trends, formally met in Weimar in 1922.

George Grosz published his collection *The Face of the Ruling Class*, which Lenin enjoyed immensely, in 1922 and 1923. A year after, he be-

came the leader of the Red Group of artists ancillary to the German Communist Party.

If Parisian Dada died with the advent of surrealism, in Germany it acted as a combination of political constructivism, proletarianization of the visual and objective world and industrialization of the artistic performance.

Dadaists Hausmann, Hannah Hoeh, Hans Richter and Kurt Schwitters later formed the core of German constructivism. In Berlin, meanwhile, expressionism was just as powerful, its left wing being definitely political and far from alien to the idea of a mass political feat of the proletariat. However, Dada attacked expressionism. This is entirely understandable considering Dada's sympathies for constructivism. Dada attacked expressionism precisely through constructivism. It attacked expressionism for its exalted phony imagery that expresses a sick inside, for rejecting the factual zone of life and the objects which populate it. Machinism and rationalism, the mainstays of constructivist organizational theory, were naturally hostile towards euphoric expressions and visions.

Art works directly on the factual plane of life, and the sights it leaves there and the visions it evokes should not stun. They should canvass. They activate the work of reason rather than the morbid imagination. Reason is the supreme motor of the creating human body. The first International Dada Fair featured a poster which read "*Art is dead. Long live Tatlin's new machine art.*" Exhibits at this fair included impressive collages, photo montages, photo attractions of participants themselves; their bodies; workaday, everyday objects and contraptions; propaganda posters and dummies; installations and aggregates which could be operated, destroyed or at least touched; the blasphemies of the Dadaists themselves. The factuality of life was turned into a circus, into circus tricks, attractions, an orgy of objects. This was the political circus of life.

Contrary to leftist political expressionism, Dada is remarkably resilient. After the tramping of the revolutionary movement in Germany, some of the expressionists retire, others commit suicide, still others sink into a deep mysticism. Dada, on the contrary, experiences exasperation. It accuses expressionism of consecration of the sick inside of man, of whimpering over its Gothic structures. Dada has no illusions. Dada does not suffer from any prophetic spirit. Dada is a saboteur and is oriented externally, towards expansion. During these years of social shock, the ontology of the world changes for the expressionists—which destroys them. For Dada, the only thing that changes is the direction of the proletarian strike, and that doesn't in the least make

them turn off the engines. Because the noise of the engines manifests the (idio)syncretism of the political, industrial and aesthetic modernization of the world.

The athletic proletarian body molds details from metal and with a geometrical precision puts together machines with which to attack the complacency of the senile world. Dada amplifies to the extreme ideology and practice of the creator—the machinist.

Since machinery is the soul of the modern world, and since the genius of machinery attains its highest expression in America, why is it not reasonable to believe that in America the art of the future will flower most brilliantly?

F. Picabia (in Kuenzli 1986)

Dada spread fast in New York thanks to the arrival of European Dadaists like Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Francis Picabia and Arthur Craven. That this Dadaist wing was leftist radical is evident by Man Ray's recollections of the Dadaist newspaper which he used to publish: "The heading consisted of three black letters: TNT. It was a political paper with a very radical slant. The words Communism and Bolshevism didn't exist then in America. TNT was a tirade against industrialists, the exploiters of workers. We were all mixed up with the anarchist group. It was anarchism rather than anything else." (in Kuenzli 1986, 146).

In New York—this stunning artifact of the industrial machine age, this mammoth realization of constructivist reason and ultimate crowding of bodies, objects and apparatuses—Dadaists found their ultimate project fulfilled. Duchamp saw his "ready-mades" on a giant scale, the mass production of identical artifacts, streams of ready-to-wear and modular space assemblages. All in all, geometrical reason has tailored titanic spaces and artifacts, buildings and prospects through its ingenious prostheses: machines, automata, cranes. Picabia saw his machine visions operating on a mass scale. The new materiality, new objectivity and new media unfolds the city's unprecedented space. New York is a unique fold—not in the earth's crust, but in the industrial massif of civilization. All suggestions for a natural essence of spatial rhythm are dispelled. The motors of this awesome swelling relief are industry and politics. They are the motors which Dada forces to the brink of a radical accident.

Political scandal, abolishing natural geometry, uprising of the objective order: all these actions Dada deployed on the relief of civilization.

THE POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF MODERNIZATION

THE MAGIC OF THE APPARATUSES

The establishing of a class bond that is visual (kino-eye) and auditory (radio-ear) between the proletarians of all nations and all lands, based on the platform of the communist decoding of the world—this is our objective.

Dziga Vertov (1984, 50)

Dada appears in an age already proclaimed futuristic. It extols the beauty of war; mass man's athleticism; synthetic materials; mechanized voice—radio and megaphones; the machine eye—photo and movie cameras. The legacy of modernism has also been absorbed incorporated in the political programs of parties and organizations to set the world straight and replace it with a radically new world, a Brave New World. Marinetti extols war as a natural excess of the senses, of the machinism and communal athleticism of bodies. War is the remarkable transgression through which politics is wholly transformed into aesthetics, and political passion into immediately aesthetic passion. Political interest contorts in a sublime military convulsion and spews forth the charred images of the new world.

THE MACHINE

We cannot improve the making of our eye, but we can endlessly perfect the camera. The weakness of the human eye is manifest. We affirm the kino-eye.

Dziga Vertov (1984, 15–16)

In it the human is overcome. The organic is surpassed by the mechanical. In the machine, life reaches its ultimate organization. The human body is merely an organ of the machine. The organic element is one of the nodes of a mechanic totality. Only now and now at last is the mind freed from the pathetic body and moves into a dwelling organized and invented by itself—the machine.

The Machinist is superman. The Machinist is not subject to subconscious repression or guilt; he is not infected by individuality or sensitivity. The Machinist is the creator of the modernized age; he has decisively overthrown the yoke of the sniffing sentimentality of his perverse body, its ugly organs bandaged with the outfits of culture—

clothing. The Creator Machinist represents the mass superorganization of bodies. In this sense, he himself is not a separate body. He is the radically organized state of the laboring bodies with a machinelike principle of common action.

The creative body attains a communal machinelike physiognomy never seen before. In it, the political and the aesthetic are one.

OCULUS EX MACHINA

I am a mechanical eye.

I, a machine, show you the world

as only I can see it.

Dziga Vertov (1984, 17)

Eyeglasses are a prosthesis to the eye. They help it see. The still and movie cameras are the superprostheses of the eye. Through them, the eye overcomes its human principle of seeing and becomes a machine. The eye itself becomes Machinist. In this sense, it becomes collective, because it overcomes its individual being, its pathetic partiality and lachrymality. The eye begins to see objectively.

The camera's objective lens overcomes the eye's organic optics. The objective lens is a crystal absolute. It is a superindividual organization of sight. It is the unified being of all possible eyes. The object-glass is the new communal constructivism of sight. It is the ultimately modernized liturgical eye. The Cyclops.

The camera is a prosthesis which has reached its perfection. Its superhuman ingenuity has radically supplanted the function of the organ. The principle of this self-activating prosthesis manifests the essence of the new agent of modernization. The new communal medium. The mass medium.

The "objective genius" manifests in itself the political order of things. It is the assembly line of interlinking *attractions*. Eisenstein's "montage of attractions" ingeniously accomplished in *Potemkin*, for example, is a manifestation of the contemporary political flux.

According to the classical bourgeois intuition "the subjective genius of art" cannot be political, in that it opens and guards the eternal, age-old order of things. In principle, it transcends the political and the eye opens itself to eternity. "Subjective genius" does not rest on montages and collages, on cutting out and pasting up shocking pictures, on attractions. It rests on the internal integrity of the chef d'oeuvres. It could not stand prostheses.

Inversely, the political art represents an ultimately focused objective genius, driven by the performance of wonderful aggregates, contraptions and linkages, by the vision of unseen laboring automata which modernize the procession of life. In general, the idea of world modernization is of inordinate political relevance.

The eye becomes agent of the objective lens. The organ appropriates the principle of action of the prosthesis. The natural is overcome. Objective vision marks a decisive victory of the unified automatic mass principle, that stems not from the integrity of bourgeois genius, but from the rhythmic action of the apparatuses.

Objectivity originates in the Machine, which has radically overthrown the Human. Thus, the objective world is always produced and never found. The modernization of the world is represented as mass production of objectivity.

Political Dada does not make mere collages of things and baubles. The world in which Dada raves is not the mercantile world of things; it is not the space of the bourgeois and of things drawn into a small private world. The world is industrial, labor communal, objective; things are uniform, not unique. They reflect mass industrial relations. This is a world in which uniformity reigns. Dada attacks the production of linear uniformity. It attacks common standards of vision. It takes over the objective eye, takes over the forms of mass consciousness. It accomplishes a wild pastiche of details and documents, of pieces and industrial refuse. This is a circus of industrially produced uniformity, a sudden breakdown of the prostheses which stimulates an erotic shuddering in the organs supported by them.

The camera's objective lens forms a link between the eye and the view. The change in the optics of the objective lens makes the link move. The objective lens is an Eye-Centaur who gallops.

The view, as well as the eye, is an agent of the optic structure of the objective lens. Political Dadaism does not merely probe your eyes or break objects. It attacks the objective structure of vision—the conjuncture formed by the eye and the object in the photograph. It attacks the photograph, that is, the linking of eye with view. Dada is a decisive intervention in the link. It dismantles it by a kick.

Photo montages, splicing and gluing, the retailoring of ready-made reality—this is the new artistic technique. Objectively snapped reality can only be recut, it cannot be recreated. The reality, which appears through the action of the machine reactivates the action of the scissors and the saw, not of the brush and carver. Cutting and fracturing, bandaging and plastering, affixing prostheses—this is the political orthopedics of modernism.

THE CUTS OF THE COLLAGE

He spoke about a surgical intervention in the grand organism of literature and life, and to prove his operation just [Pravda] he cited by heart a series of excerpts from the works of world-famous surgeons.

V. Kamenskii (1940, 59)

The eye, armed with scissors and saw, insolently trespasses the spaces of objective reality by fracturing objects, and then proceeds with plasters, bandages and prostheses. The scissors, this tireless guillotine, is the magical instrument of modernization. The diaphragm of the photo camera is an eye turned into scissors. It cuts off, like a guillotine, pieces of the vision—frames, snapshots. The diaphragm performs a spasm and contracts the vision. This contracted and cut-off view must be bandaged and fortified with prostheses. Then comes the magic of pastiche, which reassembles the view chopped up in the camera.

The vision of the artist cannot be embodied in a picture. It can be re-joined after it has been fractured and dismembered by the diaphragm. In this political surgery of sight, the view acquires a distorted body. From this comes the feeling of a disparate and then indecently cobbled together defective vision of the artist in political art. It is this principle of vision which Nazism attacks later from its party position, in order to liquidate the political art of modernism.

THE NEW AUTHENTICITY: JUSTICE OF SCISSORS

the FACTORY OF FACTS.

Filming facts. Sorting facts. Disseminating facts. Agitating with facts. Propaganda with facts. Fists made of facts.

Dziga Vertov (1984, 59)

The modern age establishes a brand new notion of “fact,” “objectivity,” “authenticity,” “documentation” and “technical reproduction of facts.” The transmission of information becomes a problem of the media, not of personae. The principles of reporting and documenting events is completely mechanized: machine voices, microphones, sequential views, wave transmission. The collage principle of broadcasting reports induces the impression of their autonomy and causal independence. They coexist, concur and associate in the flux of information disregarding any speculative holistic picture of the world.

The classical intuition of the organic integrity of the world is abolished by the vision of the objective-collage structure of the world and its political design as the motor of progress. The intuitions of sacral continuity and immanent providence are replaced by visions of collage discreteness and political plannings. Authenticity is supplanted by the media.

“They” see design rather than providence, facts rather than truth, objects rather than organs of the infinite world body.

The mammoth archive of the world swells every minute: facts, evidence, reports. What testifies and verifies the actual picture of the world is its File. We dwell in it: a File-World with perfectly developed media of tracking, deletion, documentation, registration, cataloguing.

THE NEWSPAPER

The newspaper is doubtless a collage of documents and reports, interpretations and news, type and photos. It does not represent and manifest the sacral continuity and causality of events in the world.

The paper documents facts and presents interpretations. The interpretation of a fact does not substitute the fact itself—it adjoins within a collage, stuck on it like an outfit. The collage structure generates a new intuition of authenticity—the truth (*Pravda*) of scissors and gluing.

The world is not divinely providential per se. It is a dynamic constellation of a multitude of ad hoc political designs and interests. The newspaper is a predetermined space. The exact location of a fact or document determines its political implication. Thus the paper designs the political appearance of the today’s world. The papers are shots in a reel with meaningful assemblage. The newspaper is a political “attraction” inducing ideological conclusions.

Attraction . . . is every aggressive moment . . . which acts upon the spectator’s senses or psychology, an effect which is experimentally verified and mathematically calculated with a view to causing definite emotional shocks to the perceiver; which makes possible the perception of the ideas of the things demonstrated—the final ideological conclusion.

Sergei Eisenstein, 1923 (1964, 269–73)

However, let us harbor no illusion that this political aesthetics of newspapers lasts long. In totalitarian societies where the idea of “Party” *Pravda* (truth) abolishes all others, the newspaper formally preserves its collage appearance. Party Truth and Justice (*Pravda*) justifies the Party design for permanent usurpation of power, control over all spheres of

life, inaugurating mandatory ideological figures, metaphors, images and interpretations. The totalitarian newspaper does not proceed from the political flux of facts and documents. Facts serve the implicit or explicit Party design. The Party-minded newspaper is a monumental work for it represents the Party mold of the world.

The communist papers publicize the one Party interest. Those papers do not report facts but rather their mandatory interpretations. They do not document events but their Party significance. Facts or documents cannot be credible in these papers. Only their interpretation is either credible or not. The totalitarian newspaper does not misinform. It performs the Party function. Communism is not politically discrete, but homogeneous for it expresses the unified Party will to power. Every day the newspaper informs the population about a single fact: the Party is in power.

THE CLASSICAL/MODERNIZED WORK

*Crystallize man not by a single "synthetic" portrait,
but by a whole lot of snapshots taken at different times
and in different conditions.*

A. Rodchenko (Bowlt 1988, 254)

The lofty classical notion of a work of art, of a creation, enacts an inherently complete and self-sufficient entity with its own order—beginning, progression, end and self-enclosing space. The creation is perfect in its finality, proportion and integrity.

Contrary to the act of creation, everyday life is dissipation. The constitution of the artistic entity has nothing to do with the constitution of facts in life. Creation manifests the principle of being. Thus creation testifies per se to the veritable order of the world. It is itself a travesty of the *logos*. The creation conjures up an otherwise boundless entity making it commensurate with the small-sized human being. In this sense the creation is not grounded in the everyday course of life. Everyday life strands us amid singularities and partialities. The creation builds universal forms. We face what is made invisible and unrecognizable in the course of profane life.

The classical notion of a creation is based on the radical discrimination between facts of life and facts of art. These two realms of being are regulated by different orders and rules. The modern age has started demolishing this border.

This study will not dwell on the history of the issue. The important point is that Dada brought the "world of creation" to catastrophe because it is precisely this world that decrees art as a superdisciplined and

superordered activity. The creative work is a barracks. Poetics is a command. Creativity is disciplined by a multitude of orders, rules and laws. Not for Dada. As far as Dada is concerned, the artistic act does not happen beyond the course of life. It is the maximum of life.

The artistic is closely related to the erotic: *eroticism* unbandages the cultural plasters of these body parts treated by the public as bruises, wounds and fractures of morals.

PHOTO

And show me where, and when, and of which artistically synthetic work one could say: this is the real V.I. Lenin.

There is not one. And there will not be—because there is a file of photographs, and this file of snapshots allows no one to idealize or falsify Lenin. . . . no one would allow artistic nonsense to be taken for the eternal Lenin.

A. Rodchenko (Bowlit 1988, 254)

The magic of the photographic plate imposes an inverted notion of “an original” in art. Unlike the classical creation as an immediate manifestation of essence, the photo is a substitution of life authenticity by a picture directly derived from profane reality. The photo is a shot phantom from the world of appearance. The photo is a void original for it bears the appearance of something which has vanished. It could be an original only by force of a convention, not by its material.

The virtual original retains a physical uniqueness. In this respect the negative is the photographic original. From an aesthetic perspective, however, the negative is an absolutely “reversed” excerpt from the entire picture of life. This excerpt becomes aesthetically representative only when developed. Various positive prints are something like phantoms of the original negative that could change and be different. In this respect the photographic original is shaken to the utmost insofar as it is in force only when subsequently developed and released through phantoms. The magic of the photographic plate stems from its *negative aesthetic representation*. It is a negative vision of life.

In brief, the photographic original is nothing but a mold that manufactures pictures and is significant as a technological curio. In contrast, the classical original is not an off-print of any event or a generator of phantom copies. It conveys being, not appearance in life.

Another peculiarity of classical art is that the borders of the work do not encompass in time and place the act of creation itself. The

chrono-topos of creation lays beyond the boundaries of the work insofar as the creator is located in life with his/her body and beyond it with his/her genius. The modernist creation, in contrast, gets the creator's body involved. This is precisely why the creation is an action, not an artifact beyond life. The creator is nowhere else but here, in the work, neither before nor behind it. This is the principle of the performance, happening, action. The first Dada fair was precisely such an action. Those actions do not have meanings; they have political design. They canvass and instigate.

THE EROTIC REVOLT OF THE OBJECTS

The shadow cast by a four-dimensional figure on our space is a three-dimensional shadow. . . .

The set of these three-dimensional perceptions of the four-dimensional figure would be the foundation for a reconstruction of the four-dimensional figure.

Marcel Duchamp (Kuenzli 1986, 55)

The eye recognizes only the three-dimensional shadows of four-dimensional figures. The eye actually sees negatives. The question is how the eye can unfold the fourth dimension out of what it sees or how to develop this vision. The three-dimensional objects that swim into view are allegorical figures open to their four-dimensional completeness. The eye must try to extrapolate the fourth dimension.

Marcel Duchamp is best known for his ready-mades: mass-produced artifacts which congest the space and create mass automatic habits of eyes and bodies of those who use them. The trick of the mass product is that it is no longer noticed precisely because of its regular everyday automatic usage. The body stops feeling its own prostheses which guide and control its actions. These mass-produced series of identical forms occupy the vision. The eye coasts along a vast objective field without even noticing it. We can say that this is the trick of the three-dimensional constitution of space: to discipline an automatic vision and automatic body habit on a mass scale. The three-dimensional space is stuffed with mass-produced and mass-used ready-mades.

In order to develop the fourth dimension, the eye and the body must be prevented from using the objects correctly. Three-dimensional space is regulated by the correct automatic usage of the objects. The fourth dimension emerges when the automaton fails since precisely this failure opens the eye to four-dimensional space. The new modern age does not need new objects, even though they be objects d'art. The world has been stuffed and turned into a storehouse. Art must de-automatize

the objects already there and the visions and bodies related to them. In this sense, art is an action on, rather than a production of objects. It triggers catastrophes of automata by the shock of the vision penetrating the four-dimensional space.

The emergence of the fourth dimension is caused by the breakdown of the automatic usage of the objects. Duchamp—he takes an urinal and entitles it *Fountain*. This urinal is a ready-made installed in the public lavatories of mass industrial urban space. Duchamp confronts the eye with this urinal in a public place where the body cannot do what it has always done in the “other” place. The reflex of excretion is prompt but so is the prohibition of its gratification. The breakdown emerges because of the conflict between the impulse of the eye and that of the excretory system. The title, *Fountain*, causes another shock. The name has not been merely replaced. The urinal is labeled with a name which assigns it right the opposite action: not a funnel which drains the discharge but which spews it. Reading the title, the eye is panic-stricken, exposed to the danger of being splashed. This geyser-urinal is an allegory of the revolt of objects. The fourth dimension might prove the presence of a will in the object which we have never ascribed to it.

Let us examine another of Duchamp’s masterpieces—*Large Glass* or its full title: *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. It is even, big, transparent, flat glass. A bizarre machine-like figure is engraved on it. We assume that the glass is a two-dimensional space on which a three-dimensional figure casts its shadow. The figure in the flat transparent glass is such a shadow or a *negative* through which the eye must extrapolate the missing dimension of the object thus developing its *positive*. The large glass must be developed. Duchamp loved having photos (shadows) of ready-mades at home. *Large Glass* is precisely such a photo (shadow).

Large Glass is also a showcase but a special one. Nothing is displayed behind it. What is behind is invisible. This showcase projects just the silhouettes of the objects displayed behind it. The exhibits are displayed as allegorical figures engraved on the showcase itself.

The figure depicted in *Large Glass* is no doubt an erotic one: this is a “sex machine.” The bride stripped bare by her bachelors is presented as a puppet machine. The various units and joints of this machine are ready-made objects bound and activated through transmissions. This is an allegorical orgy of objects which the eye must recognize as fornication. A “sex machine” which must be recognized as an organic act.

The machine is an allegorical showcase of the organic; the ready-made object—of the human body—and the transmission—of copulation. The erection of the fourth-dimensional body is erotic.

The world is transparent. What is not transparent are the shadows of "something" invisible in this world. "Something" which is lost in the world transparency. Thus every visible object is an allegory which figures the invisible and prompts the eye to plunge into it.

REVOLUTIONARY DEVICES

THE DEVICE AS A STRATAGEM

The purpose of art is to make us see, not recognize, things; the device proper of art is the de-familiarization of things and the encumbered form which makes perception a harder and longer process.

Art is a way to experience the making of things, what is already made in art is of no importance.

V. Shklovskii, "Art as Device" (1980, 334-42)

In 1919 Shklovskii published a small essay titled "Art as Device." It is considered to be the major manifesto of the formal school which aspires to shake up the senile and sclerotic field of art criticism. In it he claims that art criticism has lost its proper object and urgently needs to regain it, to recognize it anew. The problems of art criticism stem from the fact that it, in a historically developed self-oblivion, has neglected the art itself and substituted issues borrowed from secondary fields—such as psychology, sociology and cultural studies.

The first thing to be done is to abstract *differentia specifica* of art which could demarcate it from the zone of everyday life. Art makes a great difference precisely against the background of everyday life.

Let us summarize the basic discrepancy between everyday life and art: Life presents facts that are self-evident the way they appear. Art devises conjuring tricks, stunning skills and worlds never seen before. Life implies automatic recognition of the realities. Art implies contemplation, vision, abstention from utilizing them. Art blocks any automatic recognition and consumption of its pieces. Life communicates perception with familiar phenomena. Art de-familiarizes and excommunicates its objects by giving them estranged shapes and never tested properties. Life is an automated zone where everything works as if by itself and in accordance with an unfathomable principle. Art makes things work in an unpredictable and unprecedented manner, making no accordance with any general or particular law of life.

Man slides over the sur-face of everyday realities using different facilities that diminish friction. Inversely, man encounters the rugged

face of art where friction and resistance are utterly maximized. Life is a prefigured phenomenon. Art is a puzzle. Life facilitates existence. Art perplexes it. In life the principle of the minimum resistance rules, in art—the maximum resistance of the material.

Device is termed the constitutional unit of art. It is an invention designed on purpose to block out the principle of everyday life. The artist creates a whole set of artful plots and artifices in order to discriminate art from everyday life. *Device* is the *differentia specifica* of art and art criticism must become aware of it.

The artist, as opposed to the agent of everyday life, breaks into its automation using special techniques, stunning gear and equipment. According to this creative strategy, art is a *techne* and the artist is a *master* of an action that breaks through the thick flow of everyday life and brings turbulence into it. Art as *techne* fits together arbitrary devices that take over the causal principle of everyday life. The artist as master conducts the emergence and the expansion of this planned arbitrariness. Hence, revolution could be considered as a performance with the same features and effects as art.

The device does not trigger but rather targets the automation of life. It encumbers life imposing maximal retardation or deceleration, deviation and suspension of its strictly directed and channeled flow. We recover from life through art. We need to retrieve our initial ability to see and to wonder, not to recognize and to label things using ready-made patterns. The encumbered recognition stimulates vision. The suspended recognition urges device making. The device resembles a miraculous prosthesis assembled in the organism of life that makes life act in a stunning way or blocks its functions and generates a sudden unprecedented performance. This makes you see things bare without being forced to recognize them. According to Shklovskii the ultimate goal of art is a device to be invented and not an image to be drawn. The device generates *vision* and not *recognition* of things (*veshchi kak videnie, a ne kak uznavanie*).

The artful *device* triggers vision through estrangement and defamiliarization of things but not recognition through their probable appearance. The device inaugurates absolute discrepancy and repudiates everyday common sense decorum and rationality. The device could be termed *organon* not in the sense of an organ that belongs to an organic entity but in its other meaning of a “battle machine” that destroys walls and breaks into the fortifications of the stronghold called everyday life. More than this, the master exposes the devices that have been invented and worked out, lays them bare and thus stimulates thought. All that props up a work, all what justifies the composition of devices, all what motivates the plot—the whole is laid demonstratively bare so that the spectator can

contemplate the very formation of art, the very composition of the work as a thing different in its origin and goal orientation from what life is.

The doctrine for art formation is the doctrine for life transformation.

DEVICE AND V-EFFECT

Zeigt das Zeigen! Show that you are showing! You should not forget the attitude of showing. The attitude of showing should be basic to all other attitudes.

Brecht (Wulbern 1971, 71)

A similar idea occurred to B. Brecht. He formulated the famous *V-effect* (*Verfremdungseffekte*) as opposed to the Aristotelian mimesis and “dramatic” effect of art. Julian Wulbern in his book *Brecht and Ionesco* sums it up—“*Verfremdung*, intentional destruction of the illusion of reality or of dramatic continuity, though of course for strictly ironic effect” (p. 64). “Perversion of logic, destruction of familiar relationships, and distortion of the traditional patterns of language” (p. 66).

V-effect targets to expose through de-familiarization of the automatic principle and hidden motor of everyday life realities, to estrange the implied politics in everything that happens. V-effect makes the machine of life visible, makes you realize its principle and makes you plan how to improve, how to repair or, eventually, how to replace it. The anti-Aristotelian idea for a mimesis that terrifies not the senses but the intellect of the spectators Brecht has elaborated in his article “*The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theater*” (1968, 85–96). Mimesis is understood as a political act of estrangement from the everyday flux of life that exposes its automation. This is the conceptual core of the essay:

The actor used a somewhat complex technique to detach himself from the character portrayed . . . ‘see things a different way’

It is most important that one of the main features of the ordinary theater should be excluded from our street scene: the engineering of illusion. The street demonstrator’s performance is essentially repetitive. The event has taken place; what you are seeing now is a repeat.

We now come to one of those elements that are peculiar to the epic theater, the so-called V-effect (*Verfremdung*). What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeled as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural.

There is one thing more that we need to make the picture of the epic theater complete—the concept termed *gestus*. Brecht in his outspoken *Little Organon for the Theater* coined the term: “The realm of attitudes which the characters adopt toward one another we shall call the realm

of Gestus. Bodily posture, accent, and facial expression are determined by a social Gestus" (Wulbern 1971, 57).

The term *gestus* proliferates throughout his theoretical works in order to formulate a basic political understanding of life which is directly related to the V-effect of art. We could say that the epic (non-dramatic/non-Aristotelian) strategy of acting exercises an impact on the invisible dominant *gestus* which in a certain way keeps society disciplined. By means of the V-effect mimetic art exposes its hidden mechanism to the vigilant gaze of the spectator and thus makes it recognizable. Aristotelian mimesis induces terror and pity and thus purifies the soul of the spectator from the passions accumulated in the course of life. Inversely, Brecht launches a political campaign toward obscurantism through the artistic mode of mimesis. Mimesis equals de-automatization of the dominant *gestus* first through estrangement of its corporal social integrity, and then through an abstraction and manifestation of its mechanism on the stage.

Basically what we face here is a sociopolitical approach to acting. Everyday society reproduces an invisible automatic system of social habits—*gestus*. Through repetition and special techniques of defamiliarization and estrangement (V-effect), the stage makes this *gestus* demonstratively visible and exposes it to the bombarding of the critical reason. The master and the spectator have to be equally aware of what they do on both sides of the work of art—to be aware of the political assignment of art itself.

ECONOMY OF LIFE AND ART

Economy was a key term that penetrated the public discourse and different works on sociology, philosophy, aesthetics, politics and so on. In Shklovskii's manifesto we find formulated two "economic principles":

1. The economy of everyday life entails less resistance and minimum spending of life resources, sliding over the surfaces of reality and acting in accordance with the automata of the major social habits. Perpetual self-affirmation of an one-and-the-same value system and status quo.
2. The economy of art entails utmost gratification through utter exhaustion, excessive spending, maximum resistance, strong friction between objects, languages and bodies.

Following this strategic division we could go further:

The verbal agenda of the everyday utterance is to convey maximum explicit information and contents. What matters is the specific message abstracted from any possible form of the utterance.

The verbal agenda of art is not the priority of a message, but an erotic massage of language that stimulates and propagates a hitherto unseen meaning.

One is a demonstrative and the other an informative event. One pronounces its contents and meaning. The other announces its shape. One proposes. The other exposes.

PARODY AND IRONY IN A CLINIC OF THE ARTS

There is a lot of talk these days about irony and humor, especially by people who have never been able to practice them but nevertheless know how to explain everything.

I am not completely unfamiliar with these two passions.

Kierkegaard (1983, 22)

Parody and irony are special kinds of metadevices. They are devices for detecting and laying bare other devices. In an imaginary clinic of art, irony and parody would be the major methods of treatment.

Parody is a special kind of mimesis that copies devices from one work and pastes them into a different work, overexposes them by augmenting their major features, twists them, schematizes their appearance and triggers their mechanical repetition. This idea of parody was developed by Tynianov (1987, 30) who detected a figure of Dostoevskii's fiction—Foma Fomich as a parody of Gogol'.

Parody could repair a worn-out device by retrieving its original status of a deliberately planned unit of art. The everlasting recurrence of the device from oblivion into art goes through parody.

The realm of everyday life stores the worn-out devices abandoned by art. Using parody, art calls them back. Parody occurs when art recollects its own devices.

Irony in Shklovskii's understanding, opposes the naive attitude toward any specific utterance and language in general. It lays demonstratively bare the so-called motivation (justification) and the linguistic machine that manufactures any particular poetic utterances and literature in general—*Zeigt das Zeigen!*

Irony makes us abstract not *what* but *how* something has been said. It abolishes the subject matter and overexposes the speaking subject through the very formation of the utterance. Sentences mean nothing; they refer to nothing but to the speech act itself. They emerge as suggestive heraldry of the speaking subject. They testify only to the subject

that utters them. The ultimate irony is a mere symptom of the condition of the speaking subject and provides no detached subject-matter.

Following Soren Kierkegaard, that theologian of irony, we could say that man is doomed to use irony in order to put indirectly what God puts directly—*Ego sum qui sum!* In man's utterance between *ego sum*—and—*qui sum* lays bare the verbal corpus of irony. Through irony the *mode* of "qui sum" is de-familiarized and alienated from the *fact* of "ego sum." The human mode of being renders Ego incognito. Ego becomes an ever-wandering stranger in the domain of being.

In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard reflects on irony as an example for a radical *resignation* (alienation, estrangement, incognito) of the speaking subject from the speech act itself. Irony testifies to the fact that the speaker goes beyond language and that the act of utterance is the device by means of which he performs this. Irony provides the utterance with suggestive appearance but annihilates the immediate presence of the speaking subject himself. Irony launches the subject beyond the language and leaves the uttered matter as tokens of an inconceivable and arbitrary subjectivity. "Irony and humor are also self-reflective and thus belong to the sphere of infinite resignation; their elasticity is owing to the individual's incommensurability with actuality" (Kierkegaard 1983, 51).

Only through irony can the artist master the work. Through irony the artist overexposes the devices as the only exhibits in the space of the work. The subject-matter of the work becomes the mortal body of the eternal genius.

ZOO LAID BARE

Shklovskii devised a work entitled *ZOO* where he reflects on irony and simultaneously performs it. Irony is equally a subject-matter of the work and a mode of the work itself. Let us dismantle the major figure in it—the title itself. Zoo has no referential meaning. It is a heraldry. It heralds the intelligence of the master that invented it. It has been drawn, not written. Let us examine the figure. It contains two

circles—**OO**—and two angles put across each other—**Z**. It is an assemblage fitted together by two wheels and an angular construction.

G. Apollinaire said that the wheel was invented when man wanted to imitate walking. The wheel does not resemble the leg but was devised to imitate the motion of the leg. Mimesis performed metamorphosis not analogy, refraction not reflection—the leg was twisted into a wheel. The wheel is a prosthesis that accelerates walking and speeds up movement.

The two angles of the figure mentioned above are nothing but two crutches put together. The crutch resembles a leg much more than the wheel does. The crutch suggests a disabled leg. It makes you move much slower than by nature. The crutch signifies disability and the wheel superability of the leg. One resembles the figure of the organ, the other one transfigures it into a hitherto unseen shape that overcomes the natural principle. One is a token of the decline and the other a token of the supernatural recovery of the leg.

The device of the disabled—the two crutches—is put into a figure together with the device of the superabled—the two wheels. The figure manifests the revolution of the device.

Zoo heralds revolution.

LEF DEVISES REVOLUTION

It is not accidental that LEF called itself a LEFT FRONT OF THE ARTS: it includes in itself many different detachments—poets, artists, writers, theoreticians and so on. Each of these detachments masters a different kind of weapon—for example, among the poets we have (1) specialized laboratory workers preparing the models of the word, (2) poets of the future writing mainly about the coming day and finally (3) agitators and poster makers working on the topic of the day.

LEF-AGITKI (1925, 3)

LEF—or Left Front of the Arts is an union of revolutionary artists and writers initiated in Moscow at the end of 1922 by Maiakovskii and other futurists. The idea was an universal front of the avant-garde to be established with strictly formulated strategy and goal that could put together the endeavors of various revolutionary groups from different branches of the art. The Front had to chase away the apparitions of the bourgeois vision of life. Members were such artists and writers as Pasternak, Kamenskii, Rodchenko, Stepanova, Tatlin, Brik, Shklovskii and close to this milieu were film directors like Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Kuleshov and Shub.

As *The Grand Soviet Encyclopedia* reports, Maiakovskii eventually realized the mistake he made and deserted.

Condense your thoughts into a slogan.

Maiakovskii

How can we establish an audio link right along the front line of the world proletariat.

Dziga Vertov (1984, 56)

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